

Psalm 122
John 14: 25-31
2 Thessalonians 3:16-18

18th Sunday After Pentecost
World Communion Sunday
Midway Presbyterian Church
October 4, 2020

The Gift of Peace

Introduction to the Psalm

Our Psalm today was originally sung by Pilgrims on the way to celebrate one of the major festivals in Jerusalem. Thereafter it was used as a song of praise for Jerusalem and a prayer for the city's peace. Listen to these words from Psalm 122...

Introduction to the Gospel Lesson

Our Gospel Lesson is from a section of John called "The Farewell Discourse." Here we find some of Jesus' final words to his disciples as he prepares to depart. But they will not be left alone, for he promises the gift of the Holy Spirit to be with them forever. Another gift that Jesus will leave with them is his peace. Listen to these words from John 14:25-31...

Introduction to the Epistle Lesson

In our Epistle Lesson today we hear Paul's final greeting in his Second Letter to the Church in Thessalonica, written some twenty years following the death and resurrection of Christ. This was a church that Paul had established in his second missionary journey. A church experiencing persecution, which included stonings, beatings, crucifixions, torture, and death. Listen to these words from 2 Thessalonians 3:16-18...

Sermon

A long time ago, in the year 1182, in the town of Assisi in Italy, a man named John was born. The son of a wealthy merchant on the way to following his father into business, John spent his youth as a dashing young "man-about-town." For a while he was a soldier. But one day as

he prayed in a small church in Assisi, he felt the call of God to follow Christ in serving the poor. So John renounced his father's fortune, gave his rich clothes to a beggar, and under the new name of Francis, went on to practice the peace of Christ for the remainder of his life.

Many people of faith love that beautiful Peace Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi. Next to the Lord's Prayer, this prayer is one of the most complete and inspiring prayers that I have ever heard. Let me read it to you:

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.
 Where there is hatred, let me bring love.
 Where there is offense, let me bring pardon.
 Where there is discord, let me bring union.
 Where there is error, let me bring truth.
 Where there is doubt, let me bring faith.
 Where there is despair, let me bring hope.
 Where there is darkness, let me bring your light.
 Where there is sadness, let me bring joy.

O Master, let me not seek as much
 to be consoled as to console,
 to be understood as to understand,
 to be loved as to love,
 for it is in giving that one receives,
 it is in self-forgetting that one finds,
 it is in pardoning that one is pardoned,
 it is in dying that one is raised to eternal life. Amen.

“Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.” Certainly there is nothing more important today, more worthy of our devotion than the service of peace—the peace of God. As we try to cope with all the disorder created in policies to deal with a global pandemic. As we practice social distancing, keeping at least six feet away from others, and avoiding giving handshakes, much less a needed hug. As people have not been able to visit loved ones in a nursing home. As baseball games are played with cardboard cutouts for fans with crowd noise piped in. As we endure a contentious election process and Supreme Court nomination. As we face the stress of

racial unrest and rioting in some of our cities. As we hear threatening words from the Mid and Far East.

And who among us has not at some point in our lives been beset with pain and distress, so lacking in peace and harmony that we have at least contemplated the sweet peace of no longer having to fight the good fight. As the Psalmist once implored:

“O that I had wings like a dove!
I would fly away and be at rest.” (Ps. 55:6)

In the 14th chapter of John, Jesus speaks of the gift of his peace. The peace which the world offers is the peace of escape, from refusing to face things. One form of that peace is in the offer of drugs. The peace of escape. To that we should “just say no.” The peace which Jesus offers in the peace of purpose, wholeness, and victory over difficulties. It is a peace the world cannot give, nor can it take away. It is the knowledge and joy of our eternal salvation. To the offer of that, we should “just say yes.”

If we look at the New Testament account of the life of Jesus, we see that he had many problems to face. Pharisees out to get him. People who didn't believe him. Betrayal. Denial. Crucifixion. It is obvious that Jesus, Son of God, man of peace, didn't know a life of perfect bliss. He was on occasion, angry, as when he overthrew the tables of the money-changers in the temple, those who were turning a house of prayer into a den of robbers (Mk. 11:15-18); visibly upset and disturbed, as when he was about to enter Jerusalem on Palm Sunday and wept over the city crying, “O Jerusalem, O Jerusalem, if only you knew things that make for peace” (Lk. 19:41-44); as when he prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, “He began to be sorrowful and troubled,” and he said to them, “my soul is very sorrowful, even to death.” (Mt. 26:36-39) Many struggles. Many trials and tribulations. And yet we know him as the “Prince of Peace.” (Isa. 9:6) Well, his peace he would give to us.

In our Epistle Lesson today we hear Paul say to the Church in Thessalonica,

Now may the Lord of peace himself
give you peace at all times and in every way.

In her commentary on 2 Thessalonians, Beverly Gaventa says that whatever the people endure in the present, whatever rebellion and lawlessness threaten them in the future, whatever perils exist that they experience because of their own disorder, they can confidently expect to receive the gift of peace from the only one who is able to provide it. (*Interpretation*, p 133)

But the gift of God's peace is not to be kept just to ourselves. It is to lead us to be peacemakers.

In the fifth chapter of Matthew we have the Beatitudes. Among them is this one: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God." Notice it is the peace *makers*. Not necessarily the peace *lovers*. It is possible, for example, to allow a threatening and dangerous situation to develop, arguing that for the sake of peace, we will not act, we will not get involved. But the peace which the Bible calls blessed, comes not from the evasion of issues; it comes from facing them, dealing with them, and conquering them. What this beatitude demands is not the passive acceptance of things because we are afraid to do anything about them, but the active facing of things, and the *making* of peace, even when the way to peace is through struggle.

These peace-*makers* shall be called sons of God. That is to say they are doing the very work which the God of peace is doing. They are instruments of God's peace.

"Lord, make me an instrument of your peace."

"Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me."

"Blessed are the peacemakers."

Here at Midway we're an instrument of God's peace when we join with African American churches in our area to promote unity and goodwill. When we have for the

community a Blessing of the Animals Service that recognizes the important relationship we have with all God's creation. And we're an instrument of God's peace when we express love and care for someone going through an illness, a sorrow, a trial or tribulation. We're an instrument of God's peace when we contribute to the Peacemaking Offering today. My friends, what we need today in our homes, our churches, our schools, our businesses, our governments, our media, are thousands of peacemakers.

During Communion today, let us cherish the gift of God's peace. And let us think of one way we can be peacemakers. "Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me." God called John of Assisi...and God calls you and me to the same work of peacemaking. Let us hear his call and answer it. Let us be an instrument of God's peace.

And the peace of God, which passes all understanding,
will keep your hearts and minds safe in Christ Jesus,
our Lord. (Phil. 4:7)

Amen and Amen.